

# **EMS Safety Bulletin: Surviving the Job - Mental Health Tips**

As EMS providers, we have the opportunity to serve others, while having a rewarding experience as a Volunteer or Career provider. With this opportunity comes exposure to many stressful events. These events may result in mental and physical health issues that affect our personal and professional lives. We are great at taking care of others, just not at taking care of other EMS providers, or ourselves.

**The problem:** Occupational stress goes “along with the territory” of being an EMS provider. Many EMS providers have developed coping strategies to lessen the effects of this daily exposure to what the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation calls Potentially Traumatic Events (PTEs). These events can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and/or depression, substance abuse, work issues, home and personal relationship issues; and sometimes suicide.

**Identifying those in need of assistance:** There are many signs an EMS provider is suffering from the stress of the job. These may include but are not limited to:

- **Mood:** anger, general discontent, guilt, hopelessness, inability to feel pleasure, loneliness, loss of interest, nervousness, panic attack, or emotional distress
- **Behavioral:** aggression, agitation, hostility, hypervigilance, irritability, screaming, self-destructive behavior, self-harm, or social isolation
- **Psychological:** depression, fear, flashback, hallucination, severe anxiety, or mistrust
- **Sleep:** insomnia, night terror, nightmares, or sleep deprivation
- **Cognitive:** thoughts of suicide or unwanted thoughts
- **Whole body:** acute stress or blackout
- **Also common:** emotional detachment, headache, or lack of emotional response

**Strategies for Confronting the Effects of Potentially Traumatic Events:** EMS Providers must have access to resources to cope with the stressors associated with the profession. EMS organizations must have a program in place to address the mental health needs of their providers. There are many resources available to assist organizations in developing a mental health and awareness program.

- **The Code Green Campaign** <http://codegreencampaign.org/>
- **The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation** <http://www.everyonegoeshome.com/>
- **Reviving Responders** <http://www.revivingresponders.com/>
- **National Volunteer Fire Services Council** <http://www.nvfc.org/help>

**There are also immediate resources available for EMS Providers that may be experiencing crisis. Please call, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO STRUGGLE IN SILENCE!**

- **Safe Call Now – 1-206-459-3020:** A 24/7 help line staffed by first responders for first responders and their family members. They can assist with treatment options for responders who are suffering from mental health, substance abuse and other personal issues.
- **Share The Load – 1-888-731-3473:** Also known as The Fire/EMS Helpline. A program run by the National Volunteer Fire Council. They have a help line, and have also collected a list of many good resources for people looking for help and support.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-8255:** The national (USA) suicide hotline. Not first responder specific, but they can and will talk to anyone who needs help.
- **Lifeline Crisis Chat:** A online help chat that is part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. Get help via chat instead of telephone call.
- **Crisis Text Line:** A service that allows people in crisis to speak with a trained crisis counselor by texting 741741.

Sources: Mayo Clinic et al.

